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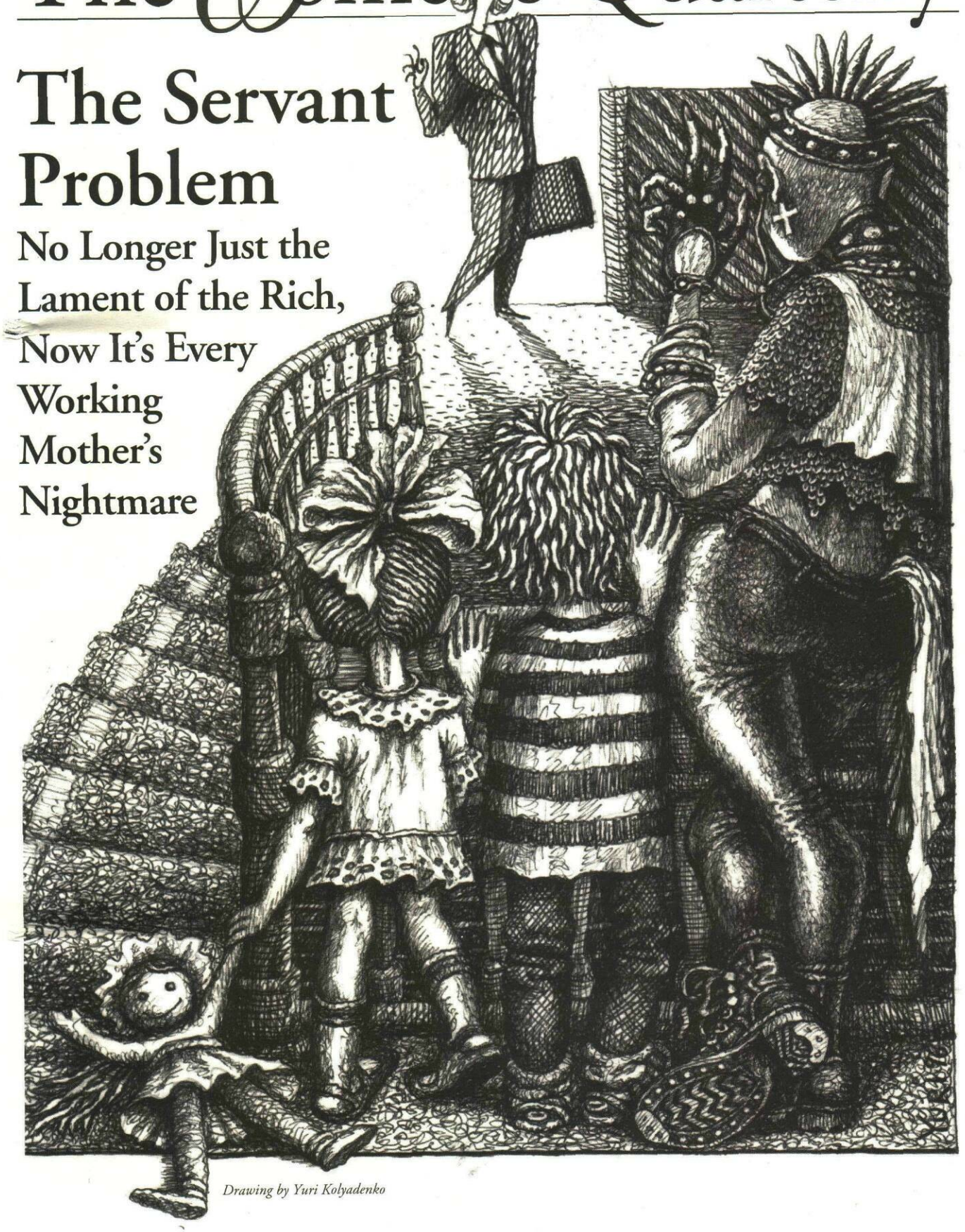
The Women's Quarterly

The Servant Problem

No Longer Just the Lament of the Rich, Now It's Every Working Mother's Nightmare



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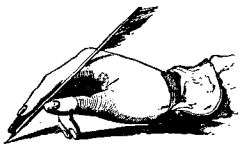
Diary



The New Servant Problem

MY MOTHER NOTICED it the first time she took her newborn granddaughter to the park. It was the same playground to which she'd taken me as a child, with the same swing set and jungle gym. In her day, the park benches had been filled with young mothers. Twenty-five years later, she was startled to see that every child in the park was accompanied by a nanny. They lined the benches, peeling fruit and chatting away to each other in half a dozen foreign languages. All the mommies had gone to work.

This little scene is played out every day in similar neighborhoods across the continent. Mothers toting briefcases wave good-bye and climb into their cars, leaving their babies and houses in the care of other women, usually immigrants from poor nations. It is these women who are cleaning up the domestic chaos that feminism left in its wake. This is one of the first things a career woman realizes when she has a baby: feminism did not eliminate household demands; it merely transferred them to somebody else. Actually, it's more dire than that. The ambitious woman discovers that her entire ability to function in the outside world rests precariously upon the shoulders of other people.

Unfortunately, the feminist leaders who implored millions of middle-class women to leave their families and homes for the work force have had virtually nothing useful to suggest about the problems this exodus created. The issue of "help" tends to be belittled by feminist organizations as a problem of the well-to-do. And so it is, assuming that we regard professional and managerial women as "well-to-do." But why pretend that the feminist revolution was ever intended for any other group of women?

Maids, factory workers, and shopgirls didn't need feminism to send them to work. The problem of "What shall I do? Who shall I be?" is the problem of the educated woman who enjoys some degree of personal choice and is above simply taking what she can get. It was this sort of woman—trapped in her ranch home with screaming toddlers—that feminism proposed to liberate.

Now, thirty years after *The Feminine Mystique*, educated women work as doctors, lawyers, bankers, managers, professors, economists, and in any number of gratifying but inflexible professions. Entry into the work force has come at a price: these women's domestic lives have become nightmares of stress and disarray. And it's these women—who incarnate the achievements of the feminist movement—who find themselves totally abandoned by it. At no point have feminist leaders given more than the most cursory thought to the vexing conundrum: Who will watch and raise the children, let alone perform all the chores and errands that need to be done when mother is no longer home to do them?

IT'S A BREATHTAKING oversight. To the degree that feminist leaders have bothered to think about it they have offered two solutions, neither of them very plausible. Some, like Betty Friedan herself in her 1981 book, *The Second Stage*, propose that men be cajoled into picking up the slack. Suckers that they are, perhaps we might persuade them to do all the tasks that are suddenly beneath the dignity of women.

Other feminists argue that the task of bringing up baby should be assigned to the government instead, in the form of a national system of inexpensive day care. That mothers have failed to take up this solution with zeal does not appear to have registered with feminists. They persist in believing that modern women suffer stress because of a shortage of places in which to dump our kids—and not because of our unwillingness to dump them. (We actually already have state-run, affordable day care for children five and older. It's called the public education system. Parents may be forgiven for not wishing to see it extended to infants.)

Nonetheless, the feminist preoccupation with day care-as-panacea has dominated national debate to the extent that measures which might genuinely help women to combine motherhood and work seldom get much attention. As we know, the needs of mothers vary from woman to woman and from occupation to occupation. Some women will be able to leave the work force entirely when they have children. Some will switch to temporary or part-time work. Others will be unwilling or unable to leave at all. Each woman is the best judge of the help she needs—and should be able to hire it directly. Alas, thanks to a baffling set of unfavorable immigration and tax laws, few women can do this without the most enormous difficulty and expense.

Because of its importance, I hope our readers will excuse us for devoting an entire issue of *TWQ* to this new—and yet very old—mother of all problems.

~ Danielle Crittenden

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"And he was always *the life of the party."*

Cartoon by Charles Jaffé

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Why Good Help Is Hard to Find

David Frum explains

EVERY WOMAN LAWYER, accountant, college professor, and business executive owes her emancipation from housework to the women who made feminism possible. No, not Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem. The women on whom feminism rests are immigrants from Oaxaca and Luzon, from Guatemala and Senegal: the nannies and housecleaners who watch the kids, scrub the floors, and do the cooking so that educated American women can become lawyers, accountants, professors, and executives.

Roughly fifteen million American women work at managerial and professional jobs. No matter how much they insist on the solidarity of womankind, only the tiny fraction of those women who do not have children at home could do their work without some sort of domestic help.

In its ruthless way, the vibrant U.S. labor market has supplied that help. About fifteen million immigrants have entered the United States since 1970, and—to a very considerable extent—they have been uneducated, unskilled, and willing to accept low wages. Thanks to those low wages, companies like Boston Market can provide the meals that professional women no longer cook. Merry Maids can do the vacuuming. Commercial laundries employ twenty percent more workers today than they did in 1980. New nursery schools and day care centers seem to open every day.

But there's one sort of help that, fifteen million immigrants notwithstanding, has become scarcer than ever, and it's the sort of help that many professional women want most of all: the old-fashioned housekeeper-nanny. It's difficult to speak confidently about the employment of domestic servants, since so many of them work off the books. But the trends, as recorded separately by both the census and the Department of Labor, are clear: Nearly two million people (virtually all of them women) worked as domestic servants in 1960, and nearly 1.5 million held such jobs as recently as 1972. But over the past twenty-five years, the number of domestic workers has collapsed. Only 980,000 women worked as full-time domestics in 1983; only 820,000 in 1995.

The shrinkage in the ranks of full-time domestic workers seems likely to continue. The Department of Labor projects that the number of women working as in-home, full-time providers of child care (a subdivision of the larger domestic-worker category) will drop from its current level of some 315,000 to between 175,000 and 200,000 over the next ten years.

How can this be happening? Professional families have more money to spend than ever before: Almost six million American households earn more than $100,000 a year (twice as many as in 1980); almost one million households earn more than $200,000. The highest-earning households also happen to be the ones likeliest to contain two full-time workers. Those families read the child development literature. They know that full-time, in-home care is by far the best (if still an inadequate) substitute for mother's

Drawing by Yuri Kolyadenko

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attention. Meanwhile, unskilled labor is cheaper and more abundant than ever before. Why aren't these potential supply and demand lines crossing?

The market for domestic service is being choked by two pressures, one economic, one cultural. Economically, domestic servants find themselves on the wrong side of public policy. The secretary who answers a female executive's phone; the courier who delivers her packages; the man who waters her office plants—the wages of all of them, like the wages of virtually everyone else whose work she relies on, are tax-deductible expenses. But the one employee whose services are most absolutely indispensable to her—the only employee whose absence will force her to be absent—is, in the eyes of the IRS, a luxury, like a cashmere coat or a BMW, to be paid in non-deductible dollars.

Oh yes, there is a child-care tax credit. But for a woman earning more than $28,000, the child-care tax credit is worth $480 if she has one child, $960 if she has two or more. The rest of her nanny's salary—which will exceed $20,000 if she is paying all the legally required taxes—is entirely non-deductible. Similarly, the employer of household labor, uniquely among employers, is required to pay all the rest of her employees' benefits (such as health insurance) with after-tax dollars.

The non-deductibility of domestic wages creates tremendous incentives to cheat on one's taxes. Because a secretary's wages are deductible from the employer's income, the employer will want to report them to the IRS—no matter how much the secretary may prefer to be paid under the table. But when a maid or nanny asks to be paid in cash, the domestic employer loses nothing by winking at the illegality. As a result, all but the most scrupulous employers look for workers willing to accept an off-the-books deal: no withholdings, no benefits, no contributions to social security or unemployment insurance, and $70 cash for a ten-hour day of hard labor.

A bad deal attracts unattractive workers—illegal immigrants, legal immigrants who speak little English, native-born workers who absolutely cannot find other work. Soon, as Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood complained, virtually the only nannies on the market will be illegal immigrants demanding to be paid tax-free. These unattractive workers, in turn, repel conscientious mothers. They decide that day care, with all its faults, is better than having one's children raised by a nanny recruited from the very bottom of the labor pool. So, while the supply of full-time, in-home help is depressed by public policies, the demand for such help is curtailed by the unappealing quality of the supply.

You might think that there would be plenty of Americans to whom even $70 a day with no benefits would look good. McDonald's and Wal-Mart don't pay significantly better. In weak labor markets, they may pay less. But here's where the cultural squeeze on the market for household help is felt.

Domestic service used to be disproportionately a black woman's job. Forty percent of domestic workers in 1972 were black, or almost 600,000 women. Black women no longer want to do this work, even if the alternatives to it pay no better. Fewer than seventeen percent of full-time domestic workers in 1995 were black—137,000 women. And whites, it must be said, frequently no longer want to employ blacks, in some cases out of malign prejudice, in others out of a lingering sense of guilt. Can anyone imagine Kimba Wood or Zoe Baird telling a black woman to clean their ovens?

Yet this sort of liberal guilt does nobody any good. In his memoirs, the former editor of the *New Republic,* Michael Straight, tells this uncomfortable story: He and three other wealthy young Cambridge students shared a house in the early 1930s. They employed a man to take care of the place, shine their shoes, and bring them meals from their college's kitchen. As the Depression intensified, Straight and his friends became infatuated with communism. They decided that they could no longer in good conscience employ a servant. They called their man in, explained their new principles, and sacked him. Crushed and terrified, the man simply asked, "What is to happen to men like me if young gentlemen like you won't give us work?"

America in the 1990s is embarking on a vast social experiment. Welfare will no longer be available indefinitely. Millions of women are going to be roughly pushed, without much in the way of skills, into a job market that demands an increasingly high level of technological competence. The odds that they will find work are very slight; the ensuing human misery could be very great.

There is, however, one job that unskilled people have always been able to do: housework. If Americans stopped imagining paid labor in the house as an indulgence for Perelmans and Rockefellers, if they began to think of it as a job like any other, they might let potential employers of household labor do as all other employers do: deduct their workers' wages and benefits from their gross income. That would tend to pull household labor back onto the books, qualify domestic workers for

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social insurance, and make it less impossible for household employers to offer their employees health insurance.

Better conditions, in turn, might make household work more attractive to native-born workers, creating a vast new industry for the least skilled women. If state welfare-to-work programs made a serious effort to train former welfare clients in basic household skills, native-born workers could at the same time be made more attractive to potential employers.

So long, however, as the domestic labor market is structured in a way that favors off-the-book employment, good jobs for good domestic workers will continue to wither away. Potential employers will unhappily put their kids into day care instead; unskilled women will have lost a form of employment that once supported nearly two million Americans. Does this make sense to anyone? ◆

David Frum, a senior fellow of the Manhattan Institute, is author of What's Right *(Basic Books:1996).*

You Can't Import It, Either

Melinda Ledden Sidak decries the absurd immigration policies that allow you to sponsor a fruit picker or butler, but not a qualified nanny

I WAS A full-time lawyer when I discovered I was expecting our first child. Mindful of the horror stories I'd been hearing from my female colleagues, I set about finding child care immediately—preferably a nanny who would live and work in our home. Although it meant stretching our budget to do so, I felt that if I could not stay home, I owed my new baby the best baby-sitter we could possibly afford. That was when I discovered that our government's immigration policy is committed to helping solve the labor problems of farmers and Park Avenue hostesses—but not those of the thousands upon thousands of working mothers who need good, qualified child care to pursue their livelihoods.

The requirements for the job I was offering were typical of most nanny arrangements. I wanted someone who was professionally committed to the care of children and who could be expected to remain with us for several years, not someone looking for an interim job until she found something more interesting. She should be able to speak and read English moderately well—enough to understand a note from me or a poison warning on a bottle. And, given that we live in the suburbs, she needed to be able to drive. In return, we would offer her regular hours, a good salary, and benefits.

These few qualifications, however, were beyond most of the applicants. And this, as I would later learn, is the chief problem that every working mother who doesn't want to put her child into institutional care encounters. Very few native-born Americans are willing to do domestic work. Most people who reply to ads are relatively new immigrants from underdeveloped countries whose English is poor and who don't qualify for much else.

Their situations are often heartbreakingly poignant: They earned degrees in engineering in their home countries but cannot get work over here in their field, so they'll take care of your baby to pay the way for night classes. Many others just turn up at your door, some legal, some not, all with an assortment of problems—no English, no driver's license, no references, or having some frightening quality to their personality that makes you nervous. Often their experience with children has come hard—taking care of their younger brothers and sisters in circumstances of dire poverty. Or they have left their own babies in the care of their parents or husbands to travel to the other side of the planet in search of better pay that they will then send back, keeping almost nothing for themselves.

As candidate after candidate comes through your living room, each with her own wrenching story, you begin to lose hope. In the beginning you expected Mary Poppins. By the end of the process, you're hoping to find the least implausible person, someone you pray will simply be up to the task.

This shortage of skilled, professional nannies in the United States owes much to the fact that until fairly recently, most children were cared for by their mothers; there was little demand for full-time child care in or

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out of the home. There is no tradition here of professional nannies, au pairs, and mother's helpers. Domestic work of any kind has long been regarded as a low-status occupation.

It's therefore unsurprising that the influx of women into the work force during the past three decades has created an insatiable demand for child care that cannot be satisfied with native-born workers. To fill the demand, there is no option other than to import large numbers of immigrants from around the world who are willing and eager to take care of our children. Yet, as I also learned, our government is determined to make it impossible for us to do so.

When I did finally find the perfect candidate—an English nanny with the requisite training and experience, already working legally in this country—there was one catch. The visa she'd obtained as an employee of a diplomatic family was due to expire in just over a year and could not be renewed by regular old Americans. Evidently, our government is solicitous of the domestic needs of foreigners and World Bank employees, but not of those of its own taxpaying citizens.

No problem, I thought. I'd heard that an American citizen could sponsor a foreign worker. Immigration was just a legal process that involved filling out a bunch of routine forms. And my husband and I were both lawyers—we'd clerked for federal judges, held responsible government jobs, and worked for nationally-known law firms. What could be easier?

Yet after two frustrating months of trying to figure out the tortuous and perverse bureaucratic maze that is the U.S. alien labor certification and immigration process, and assisted by several friends who had either sponsored nannies or had some experience with immigration law, I threw up my hands in disgust. I consulted the best immigration lawyer in Washington, D.C. in the hope that he could rescue us from the morass.

What he told us was, if anything, even more depressing. Obtaining a green card is an intensely bureaucratic process involving sequential reviews by multiple federal and state agencies and exhaustive documentation. Four different agencies are involved: the state labor department, the regional office of the Department of Labor, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and, in some cases, the State Department. Any one of these can become a roadblock. Each has a complex set of rules that must be satisfied before an approval is issued. First, the state labor or employment agency and, subsequently, the regional office of the DOL must issue an "alien labor certification." This is necessary to prove that the employer—after diligent, good faith efforts—has been unable to locate a qualified American or legal resident to fill the job. You also must demonstrate the ability of the employer-sponsor to pay the prospective employee the prevailing wage for the particular job.

Even then you're not through. After obtaining the alien labor certification, the application is sent to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which reviews the documentation and determines the type of visa, if any, for which the alien is eligible. That classification is important because it determines the waiting period the alien faces before he reaches the end of the long line of eager prospective immigrants awaiting green cards. The application is then held either at the INS or the State Department, often for many years, until the alien reaches the front of the line and a date on which the precious card will be bestowed can be determined.

It turns out, though, that because of the heavy demand for visas, especially for domestic workers, and the extremely long waiting periods involved, it is virtually impossible to hire someone this way. In the 1980s, the process took about two to three years. Today, thanks to changes in the law, it takes an average of between ten and fifteen years. And you can't obtain a temporary visa. Needless to say, parents need child care now, not ten to fifteen years from now. The obviously ridiculous premise of the current system is that a decade or so beforehand, you have to know that you are going to need full-time child care in, say, the year 2007. You then locate a foreign nanny who would like to immigrate to the United States about the same time, and until then is content to wait out the process in her native land.

It's no wonder that so many parents choose simply to employ the worker illegally, pending approval of the application, even though that subjects them to sanctions under the immigration law. As my lawyer noted, "When people face the choice between a possible civil fine and no child care, they choose the risk of a civil fine."

You're in luck, however, if you want to hire a butler. Or if you can somehow persuade the immigration department that, in between taking care of your child, your nanny is a migrant farm worker picking fruit in your backyard.

Congress made further changes in the immigration laws in 1990 in order

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to provide expedited approvals for workers classified as "skilled," defined by the INS as persons having at least two years of education or professional experience. Some people may thus quickly obtain green cards for various kinds of domestic servants. Jobs such as "butler," "household manager," and "cook" are classified as skilled positions for which the waiting period is considerably shortened. And if that "cook" happens to be mainly preparing meals for the children and watching them in between, well, that's a bit hard for the DOL or the INS to determine. On the other hand, the average middle-class wage earner cannot hope to evade official suspicion if she sponsors a "butler" to work in a house with no other servants and several small children.

The policy continues to annoy me to this day. The DOL, with the stroke of a pen, could help working women and children in this country enormously simply by creating a new job category called "nanny" and permitting employers to require two years of experience. That would catapult nannies into the skilled visa category and substantially shorten the waiting period. How many times have you heard government officials, including Secretaries of Labor, piously deploring the difficulties facing working women and the dearth of good child care? Yet nothing is done about it. Efforts by immigration lawyers to persuade the DOL to create a category that would designate foreign-trained child-care workers as skilled have come to naught.

Even speeding up the process, however, would still not get around the problem of providing child care while waiting for the necessary approvals. Congress allows farmers to bring in guest workers. Why is it so hard for Congress to permit a similar program for seekers of qualified nannies?

Ironically, a version of such a scheme exists in the au pair program. Originally intended as a cultural exchange program to permit young Western European women to live here for a year to learn English, working parents quickly latched onto it as a way to secure affordable child care. This has the perverse result of making it fairly easy to bring in wholly inexperienced girls, whose main objective is tourism, to take care of children, while trained and experienced nannies who have made children their lives' work are kept resolutely out.

While many such au pair arrangements work out okay, there have been several notorious cases in which au pairs have been tried for abusing and even killing the small children left in their charge. Controversy about the program, spurred by the 1994 shaking death of a Virginia infant, allegedly at the hands of her Dutch au pair, caused the U.S. Information Agency, which oversees the program, to improve screening and training rules. But shouldn't it be as easy for parents to sponsor a truly qualified individual as it is an au pair?

THE DIRTY SECRET is, feminist organizations and politicians who otherwise trumpet their concerns about inadequate child care are reluctant to make it easier to sponsor foreign nannies because it would be viewed as benefiting the rich. Actually, as we have seen, the rich already benefit from the immigration rules. The people change would help are the majority of working mothers who don't want to consign their children to institutional care. The fact that so many parents are willing to assume the risks of employing an inexperienced au pair or of incurring civil fines for an illegal alien clearly demonstrate the lack of viable alternatives. Why turn otherwise law-abiding citizens into criminals?

Moreover, by making it easy to bring in trained, qualified help, we would increase the number of the nation's experienced child care workers. A higher degree of professionalism enhances the overall status and prestige of the job, and increases the total supply of trained workers by attracting more people, including the native-born, to the profession. The more nannies there are, the more affordable it is for parents of all incomes to employ a single, full-time, in-home provider of care, which is far superior to institutionalized day care.

Furthermore, by treating nannying as a profession on a par, for instance, with teaching or office work, we would increase the protections for the employees themselves. The illegal status of many domestic workers leaves them vulnerable to the worst kinds of exploitation by some employers. Unaware of their rights and fearful of complaining lest they be deported, many foreign baby-sitters suffer long hours, low wages, and substandard living conditions.

But don't hold your breath that things will improve. Under the new restrictive immigration legislation passed by Congress last year, there will be stiffer penalties for employers who hire illegals.

Come to think of it, given the craziness of the current system, maybe it's the government that needs professional help even more than we do. ◆

Melinda Ledden Sidak, a Washington lawyer, is now a full-time mother of three.

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And Even When You Find It...

...it's still a problem, observes *Diana West*

The English nanny, her reputation enhanced by an amalgam of fictional characters, has long been institutionalized, even Disneyfied, into brand-name saintliness. Of course, some of these literary characters are themselves a bit strange, such as dear, odd Mary Poppins. Then there's *Peter Pan* and Wendy's devoted Nana, who was, after all, a black Newfoundland dog. It was probably Charles Dickens who created the line's progenitor with such characters as Miss Pross (*A Tale of Two Cities*) and Peggotty (*David Copperfield*), exemplars of the starched, lion-hearted devotion which late twentieth-century mothers can only dream of in their quest for better child care.

Dream on. Such dedicated self-sacrifice is not to be found in today's American-style nanny, a.k.a "caregiver," who, despite a job title that sounds as if it might be performed by a worker bee, is usually a fully enfranchised American citizen (or so one tells the IRS). Tocqueville had it figured out 150 years ago when he explained that selflessness for hire exists only in aristocracies where the servant class, as permanent as the ruling class, tends to identify with its masters—at least, one might add, until the revolution.

Since "servants" have become almost as démodé as "masters," the hierarchy that once supported their symbiotic relationship—Tocqueville's "strange medley of two existences"—is not only antiquated, it's extinct. If one

Mrs. Everest, nanny to Winston Churchill

is prepared to treat Southern slavery as a separate subject, aristocratic hierarchy never found a firm foothold in this country (Kennedy worship notwithstanding). Thus, as M. E. Sherwood, a social arbiter of the Gilded Age, put it, "It is to be feared that the Declaration of Independence is between us and good service."

Once upon a time, in the aftermath of the American Revolution, it was considered almost un-American to hire domestic help, the notion of "staff" being too closely associated with the British way of life. Mercifully, such idealism quickly compromised itself, although the fashion in the nation's early days was to de-emphasize pomp and livery. After the Civil War, the "hired girl" was etymologically transformed into the "maid," a distinctly European term that mirrored the new class-puffing pretentiousness that Mrs. Sherwood documented in two popular etiquette books.

When Mrs. Sherwood was writing in the 1890s, the pool of domestic help came almost exclusively from Europe. Mrs. Sherwood offered her readers a taxonomy of the different nationalities and their propensities to serve: British nannies, housekeepers, and butlers knew their place; French lady's maids were inclined to treachery; and German servants might turn out to be Nihilists—"a dreadful possibility." Off-the-boat Irish filled out the household complement from gardeners to scullions, although they required much training, after which they were likely to move on to better jobs in shops and factories. Hence the lady's lament: A secure place on the lower rung of domestic service paled next to the higher reaches of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

Mrs. Sherwood's take on the democratic domestic quandary—having help and equality, too—resonates to this day. Class structure still inserts itself in the running of household staff, even when that staff is composed of just one person. No longer, however, is it the household employee who is electrified by the notion of equality; in the late twentieth century, it is the employer who is transfixed, even paralyzed, by it.

Recall that by the end of the last century, the "hired girl" had turned into a "maid." One hundred years and

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countless raised-consciousnesses later, no Americans have "maids," excepting, of course, *Latin* Americans, but that's another story. The word "maid," far from reflecting glory on the lady of the house as it once did, is something from which modern women tend to recoil as a gruesome reminder of the inequalities that persist even in this determinedly egalitarian society. Hiring someone to change sheets or diapers reintroduces a most politically incorrect social structure: a pecking order that is awkward when it is not downright embarrassing.

Amid a sprinkling of European au pairs (sullen teens with charming accents), the bulk of the domestic work force is composed of women from the Third World. Having crossed oceans and land masses to earn dollars for their families back home, they have little or no thought of American social mobility. Conscious or not, an employer's guilty sense of reverse colonialism makes for an uneasy relationship; it further clouds the enigmatic lines of household command that have become increasingly obscured by a cultural aversion to authority in general. Whether the employee is from Paris or Pakistan, simple orders from the enlightened employer become pleading requests: "Could you—*would you*—mind (if you have some time) cleaning the oven?" Or: "Could you not—*would it be okay if you didn't*—speak Tagalog to the baby? Her brain is extremely receptive to language right now, and Tagalog is...great but...okay?" (a brave smile). This is not the way the same lady talks to either her lawyer or her dry cleaner.

The modern matron, struck all but speechless by the intimacy of the work required and the drudgery such work demands, finds herself a-dither. Ovens must be cleaned, diapers must be changed. What to do? She hires someone for the housework (and to help with the kids), or someone else for the kids (who does housework on the side). But wasn't the technological revolution supposed to set all of us free? Apparently, it didn't—excepting, of course, the matron herself who has been liberated to pursue a career. To make that professional life possible, in spite of the best of democratic intentions, she must introduce and preside over an archaic social hierarchy in her own home.

The much-vaunted English nanny is not the answer, either. If anything, she is even more of a problem. Tom Wolfe trots one out for a cameo in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* who, far from being a pleasant, porridge-dolloping breeze of crisp authority, is instead a repository of stale snobbery that produces pangs of miserable inadequacy in a couple of over-extended, under-cultured Manhattanites:

"They called her Glenda. She called them Mr. Kramer and Mrs. Kramer, instead of Larry and Rhoda. Everything was upside down. Glenda was the very picture of gentility, having tea, while Mr. Kramer, lord of the ant colony, came tramping through to the bathroom bare-footed, bare-legged, tousle-headed, wearing a tattered old plaid bathrobe." Talk about reverse colonialism.

As Mrs. Sherwood understood, the makeshift hierarchies that exist in this country do so on shaky ground. Employers who casually mention having "someone who comes on Fridays" find themselves tongue-tied when they have to boil "someone" down to a more specific noun. But which noun? "Cleaning lady" is a respectable choice, although the more squeamish will shrink from its menial implications, not to mention the freighted meanings of the word "lady." A neighbor of mine refers to her "father's cleaner-helper-person," which of course not only hitches together bits of gender-neutral euphemism, but returns all responsibility for the labor arrangement to the patriarchal unit. "Live-in" is commonly used, although it still begs the question: live-in what? The term of consensus seems to be "housekeeper," despite the inaccuracy of this distinctly managerial title.

In its inaccuracy, however, lies its virtue. As far as the sensitive, correct, modern employer is concerned, calling a "maid" a "housekeeper" elevates that employee's stature and enhances her dignity. No longer is she someone who labors so that her employer may join the executive set; she's a manager, too! But in this assuredly well-meaning job description lurks a hidden element of selfishness. Having boosted the worker's paper status to her own satisfaction, the employer has reduced her intense personal discomfort with their relative places in the social hierarchy, thereby minimizing, by dint of diction, its very existence.

But, as they say, actions speak louder than misnomers. "Housewife" and "housekeeper" may on the surface sound like colleagues—peers, even—but in practice one peer still tells the other peer what to do, or at least tries to (if it's not too much trouble). Maybe this isn't as it should be; it certainly isn't as we are taught. But neither euphemism nor good intentions alter the fact that there's dirty work to be done and the lady of the house wants someone else to do it. ◆

Diana West contributes to the Weekly Standard, *the* Atlantic Monthly, *and the* New Criterion, *among other publications.*

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Why Me?

The editor's mother, *Yvonne Crittenden*, recalls a generation of women who did more and moaned less

In the bad old days of the 1930s and '40s, my mother, a suburban Australian housewife, employed servants. They were not called servants, of course. Australians, being chauvinistically proud of their perceived lack of subservience to England, the mother country ("Bloody Poms!"), nonetheless aped all its customs and traditions while pretending not to. My middle-class parents did not have a lot of money, but having domestic help was not considered a luxury back then, even when mothers stayed home, as mine and every other child's did, unless they were single parents and had to work.

I vaguely remember a succession of fresh-faced country "girls" who came in when my brother, sister, and I were little, to help with the laundry, the cleaning, the cooking, and the occasional baby-sitting. Once we were in school, the servants disappeared and my only memories of what would now be called "substitute care" were the odd baby-sitter at night, and being dropped off once in a while in the city (Melbourne) at a "crèche" while my mother was shopping. These crèches were a bit like today's ubiquitous indoor playgrounds, but spartan in comparison, with a few broken toys, and not remembered with fondness.

When I emigrated to Canada in the mid-1950s, I dropped out of my news reporting job (we didn't pursue "careers") to have children. I was happy to stay home and raise my son and daughter for seven years, until they were both settled in school. This, too, was the norm for most of my generation. Becoming a full-time mom, after working from the age of sixteen, was a joy and fulfillment I didn't think twice about, although money was tight. My husband and I lived in rented apartments with little furniture, had no car, walked to stores, and traveled by public transit, even for summer holidays, when we'd haul the kids on a bus and journey to a rented cottage north on one of Ontario's many lakes.

The first time I had to hire help was when my husband, then a news editor, inexplicably decided the way to make our fortune was to buy a rooming house. His family in Australia had once owned lucrative hotels and guest houses, and although they had lost everything in the Depression, there seemed to be a landlord gene in him and his brothers. So, with a tiny downpayment, we bought a rooming house in a respectable part of Toronto, and found ourselves suddenly with a huge mortgage and instant landlords to some thirteen bachelors.

The large house was subdivided, with accommodation ranging from single rooms to one-bedroom suites with kitchens and bathrooms. A communal kitchen and several hall bathrooms served the single roomers. "Maid service" was included in the rent, and if we were to keep our tenants and pay down the mortgage, we would have to continue to provide this luxury.

The nine months we owned the rooming house were one of the darkest periods of my life, partly because of irresponsible tenants who routinely defaulted on their rent, sometimes decamping in the night owing us weeks' worth of money. This was easy to do since we didn't live on the

Drawings by Yuri Kolyadenko

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premises—there was no apartment big enough for two adults and a toddler. If even one tenant was late with the rent, we worried about making the mortgage payments.

But my worst nightmare was the maid service. The cleaning women we employed often called in sick at the last minute, and I would have to trudge through the heavy snow of a Canadian winter, pushing a cranky two-year-old son in a stroller, to act as substitute maid (my version, in retelling the story to my children, of walking to school across the ice in bare feet!).

Cleaning up after thirteen bachelors beggars the imagination. Beds had to be made, rooms vacuumed and dusted, dishes washed (one tenant, a financial reporter, fancied himself a gourmet cook and regularly entertained his girlfriends, then left a kitchen filled with filthy utensils and bed linen with unspeakable stains), and toilets cleaned (in India, only the "untouchable" caste has to do this, I would mutter to myself grimly). I came to dread early morning phone calls, since it was inevitably the maid calling in sick. My son trailed around after me while I was cleaning up, and once ended up in the emergency room of the local children's hospital after sampling the furniture polish while my back was turned.

Finding a buyer for this ill-fated venture (we barely got out with our original deposit) was one of the happiest days of my life, and I vowed never again to be a landlady. The experience gave me a lasting respect for people who provide domestic help (I became the kind of employer who cleans up before the cleaning lady arrives!) and a mistrust of people who rent. Maybe coincidentally, I immediately got pregnant with my daughter and continued to be a full-time mother until the day she left for school at age four.

That morning, when I returned from walking her to kindergarten, was like a dash of cold water—What would I do with the rest of my life? I'd had my first child at age twenty-five, my second at age twenty-seven. Now I was thirty-two and ready for a challenge, but felt guilty about leaving the children for a job. I tried joining a women's church group but was bored and felt completely alienated from women who had mostly not worked since having children and had no intention of going back. Then I considered a part-time job and was about to apply to be a research assistant to an academic when my husband told me bluntly that I was a fool not to go back to full-time journalism if I could.

I realize I was fortunate to have an occupation that allowed me to stay at home for a few years without my skills becoming too rusty. I'd kept my hand in with the occasional freelance article, and although I was scared stiff at re-entering the work force, I turned out to be a better writer than before, the result of life's seasoning.

I got a job on a daily newspaper and was immediately faced with what has become the central dilemma facing today's working mothers: how to find good substitute care. These were the days before mothers were going back to work in such ever-increasing numbers (I remember being the odd woman out waiting at the bus stop among all the business-suited men, and feeling dreadful about leaving the kids). There were few if any agencies to screen child-care providers or to help with the search for a substitute mom. Unless one was fortunate enough to have willing relatives or friends to help out, one simply scanned the "Domestic Help" ads in the daily paper and hoped for the best.

My first baby-sitter was a young Jamaican immigrant named Daisy who seemed competent and willing to do the job, which was to meet my daughter at school at lunch time, feed her, and stay till I arrived home from work between five and six P.M. (my son was old enough to make his own way home). Cooking supper, cleaning, play skills, or other chores were not demanded; I simply needed an adult in the house to make sure the children didn't kill themselves or each other. The going rate for these half days was about thirty-five dollars per week, which sounds ludicrous today but was reasonable then, particularly since it was usually under the table and thus tax-free.

Daisy, my kids told me when they were safely grown up, was hopeless at discipline when they misbehaved, climbed on the roof, or got up to other pranks, of all of which I was thankfully unaware. She would chase them around the house, waving her slipper, shouting "You little devil!" which they found hilarious and provoked her even more. Daisy quit fairly soon, to be replaced by Ruth, a no-nonsense, sixty-something widow from Nova Scotia, whom the kids liked and whom I trusted implicitly. She stayed with us through my divorce, a move to a new house, and remarriage to my second husband. In fact, Ruth, motherly and sensible, became so fond of us that she delayed going back to Nova Scotia, where she planned to marry an elderly lover, until I was safely remarried to a man she approved of.

I was still working full-time, although I asked for and got summers off unpaid to be with the children. I

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gladly sacrificed the pay to assuage the guilt of not being around to enjoy the holidays with them, and think this kind of "flex time" would be a godsend to many of today's working mothers.

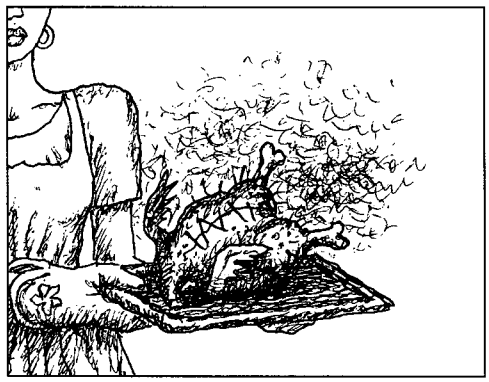
Our last sitter was another Nova Scotian, Mary, a descendant of the American slaves who'd fled to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Mary was an orphan, brought up by nuns, and filled with wisdom and good humor. She must have been close to sixty, looked about forty, and doted on her second, much younger husband named Ted. Her children by her first marriage were teenagers. The kids liked and trusted Mary. I paid her slightly more, since the child-minding chores had lessened and she was supposed to do some light house cleaning. I suspect, getting home tired from my job, that Mary had spent most of the afternoon in front of the TV, but since I knew the children were in good hands, I chose not to make a point of the house looking suspiciously dusty.

The day I let Mary go, when the children reached their teens, was a liberating one. I loved having my house back to myself and not having to depend on anyone anymore. Perhaps this all says a lot more about me and my life experience than it does about my generation in particular, although I suspect not. I look on, bemused and perhaps a bit impatiently, at the new generation of middle-class working mothers and their struggle to balance the demands of careers, motherhood, and home.

Their expectations are so much higher than mine were, their lives seemingly more complicated. Their concerns about providing every kind of gratification for their children (except, perhaps, their own presence at home while the kids are very young) are, to my mind, unrealistic. They generally have far more supportive husbands, who help out with child care and housework much more than my generation's did, even if the main burden still falls on them. A whole industry has sprung up to provide these mothers with infant care, day care, and domestic help.

Governments worry about women's status, and legislation keeps being introduced to ensure that they are treated equally, especially in the work place. While nobody wants to return to the 1940s and 1950s, from my perspective there were fewer pressures on working mothers to be superwomen. We—and our children—seemed to muddle through and be none the worse. Perhaps we were even strengthened by the experience. ◆

Yvonne Crittenden lives in Toronto, where she reviews books for the Toronto Sun *and enjoys baby-sitting her three grandchildren.*



Meanwhile, her whining daughter, *Danielle Crittenden*, recalls a short-lived career as au pair to a grand French family

At eighteen, I decided to learn French by living in Paris. The best way to do this, I thought, given that I had no money, would be to work as a servant.

That I did not think of myself as a servant in no way hindered my plans. The French term for what I would be was au pair, and many of my friends were taking these positions as a cheap way to see Europe. They wrote me letters exclaiming about the charm of French life, the skiing and boating trips the kindly French families took them on, and how much language they were picking up just from being with the children, let alone the classes they managed to squeeze in. Shortly after I arrived in Paris, a student agency gave me the phone number of a Madame C., who was seeking an au pair to look after her two boys.

Madame C. lived in an apartment high atop the Avenue de Suffren, a very grand boulevard that runs alongside the Champ de Mars, the magnificent parade grounds that Louis xv laid out for the École Militaire. It was a beautiful building, older than I could possibly imagine and for that reason,

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packed with charm. You reached the apartment by an ornate, caged elevator that ascended from a tiny lobby inlaid with at least eight different colors of marble.

Madame C. was immediately imposing, a tall woman with beautifully swept back blonde hair in the style of Catherine Deneuve. A pair of expensive sunglasses perched on top of her head were, I would later discover, a permanent accessory, their position changing only slightly when she lowered them, like Roman shades, as she stepped outside.

Madame C. showed me around the apartment, vaguely waving at all the rooms, while giving me a brief description of her boys, aged six and ten, who were at that moment in school. My job would start at about two in the afternoon and last until the boys were ready to go to bed, around eight at night. That would leave me the mornings free to pursue my "studies." I would live in a *chambre de bonne*, which was a small maid's room housed separately on the top floor of the building among other *chambres de bonne*, three flights up and accessible by an outdoor fire escape that connected to the back of her kitchen. In addition to all this, I would be paid two hundred francs per month—or forty dollars, as the exchange was then—including room and board. It seemed an excellent deal. That very evening her husband, Monsieur C., picked up me and my suitcases from the youth hostel where I was staying, and drove me to my new employment in his shiny, sporty Citroën.

The problem began my first afternoon, when Madame C., wearing her bathrobe and sunglasses, tried to instruct me in the art of ironing little pairs of boys' underwear. As I scorched and mangled pair after pair, Madame C. hovered over me, sighing impatiently and muttering, *"Non, non, pas comme ça—comme ça!"* I grew balkier and balkier. It wasn't that I was opposed to ironing boy's underwear. It had just never occurred to me that underwear needed to be ironed—or even folded.

I was raised, after all, in the modern, North American, middle-class fashion. My mother had equipped me with some basic skills of survival. I knew how to make my own bed, rather sloppily. I knew to separate colors from whites (and to wash one in cold and the other in hot but I often wasn't sure which). Thanks to several years of home economics, still mandatory at my public high school (along with square dancing), I could sew a hem proficiently—and even straight if I cared enough about it—and bake hard, tasteless biscuits from flour and baking soda. As a bonus, thanks to many years of summer camp in the Canadian wilderness, I'd won badges in canoeing and sailing, knew how to tie several sturdy boat knots (handy for younger brothers), and could tell deciduous from coniferous trees. As for cooking, while it's true I'd grown up before microwaves became ubiquitous, I'd still never met a vegetable that hadn't been frozen first.

Madame C. sized this up pretty quickly, and took it upon herself to instruct me *à la française*. When I finally got the ironing right, she moved me on to the kitchen. There she lined up a row of lettuces and ordered me to make a salad. After I hacked the first one up, she moved in. She ripped my unwieldy pieces into elegant bits and scolded: "Danielle—We are not rabbits! *Comme ça!*" And so it went. As I crawled up the fire escape to my room at the end of my first evening, I felt pathetically sorry for myself and regretted what I'd got myself into.

The next day was the same, and the same after that. Madame C. would stage surprise attacks, always managing to catch me in the act of screwing something up. "Zee bed corners, Danielle!" (She gave up trying to speak French to me, realizing that her English was better than the French my bilingual country had so laboriously tried to drill into me.) "Zay should be tucked in like so—you see?" When she wasn't monitoring me, she was wandering around the apartment, chatting on the phone, and holding up swatches of fabric against the dining room walls. Occasionally she'd vanish for an afternoon appointment, and I'd breathe easier—until the boys arrived and began their daily taunting of me in phrases I didn't understand.

Meanwhile, my little *chambre de bonne*—so charming at first!—more and more began to resemble a tiny prison cell. It had only a small sink, which made it hard to wash in the mornings (a North American affectation, I know). Madame C. had generously offered me the use of her shower, but she was in her bathroom every day until noon. She'd also hinted that there were some sort of maid facilities down the hall from my room, but I avoided them. I got the sense, from the clatter and wailing from behind the closed doors, and the laundry strung over the wrought iron balconies, that there were entire families living in *chambres de bonne*, and if they weren't families, they were leering Algerian men who sullied the only toilet and hissed at me through their teeth.

I wrote despairing notes home, full

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of underlining and exclamation marks. She wants me to *iron* the *underwear!* My older brother delighted in my new situation, and wrote back, "What did you think it would be? Wake up and smell the coffee?" Madame C., sensing my unhappiness, one day brought her swatches up to my room. It was sweet, I thought, how nice she wanted to make it for me, her prisoner. Another day, after I'd asked her for a small table, she brought up a little gilded *écritoire*—a desk she'd used as a girl—impossible to sit at and even more impossible to write upon. "Perhaps we should paint..." she would say on these rare visits, glancing around before scuttling off again.

She *was* trying—and certainly I was trying her. Unfortunately, we were entirely at cross purposes. Madame C. needed me to gain herself a bit of freedom from the children, and my happiness therefore became critical to her happiness. But she declined to pay the sort of wage that would have hired her someone actually willing to do the work. I'd taken the job in order to see Paris, yet had neither the freedom nor the money to do so: I was obliged to dip into my tiny savings just to buy a few subway fares and a daily coffee at the café on the corner.

So she dangled little incentives before me: "You know, Danielle, we travel to northern Italy in the winter, where we ski. You'll of course come with us...." Alas, I knew this not to be an invitation to join them with a mug of *gluvein*, halfway down the *piste*, but for a week of overtime without pay, watching the boys kill each other out of boredom in the hotel while Madame and Monsieur enjoyed the slopes. When these gambits failed, Madame C. tried to impress upon me the couple's importance in Parisian social circles, as if, like Anthony Hopkins in *Remains of the Day*, the pride and reflected glory I'd enjoy serving this fine and honorable family of France would more than compensate me for my humble poverty.

The days grew tense. Madame C. would leave me vegetables to cook that I had never seen before. "Danielle, this is sorrel. Have you not heard of it? It is bitter. It is *chic*." My best friend from Canada, who was passing through Paris on her way to the university at Dijon, arrived on the evening of my greatest test: a roast chicken. Madame had left it for me in the sink, with orders to cook it for supper.

Fortunately my friend knew what to do. As she lay in my *chambre de bonne* reading a novel, I carried the chicken in its pan up and down the fire escape, first to have her inspect my washing and tying, then to make sure the bird was seasoned correctly, and then several times after that to check whether it was cooked. She'd glance across the top of her book: "That looks fine, Danielle. Another ten minutes, until the skin is nice and brown." Back down I'd go. Finally it was ready. I presented it to the boys, who greeted it as they greeted anything I offered them: like it might contain poison (I was not offended—they were this way with their mother, too). They picked at it and ran off to watch TV. I washed up.

The next day Madame C. stopped me in the kitchen. "Danielle, that chicken you cooked last night—it was very good, very tender. Monsieur and I had some with our dinner." I beamed—and then offered her my resignation. She took it very decently. She sensed I was not destined for a life playing Rose in "Upstairs, Downstairs." I packed my suitcase immediately and dragged it down the fire escape to join my friend at her youth hostel.

The next day we would take the train to Dijon. For six months we'd live in a two-room, sparsely furnished flat in a seventeenth-century tenement. Only much later—after enduring snickers whenever we gave our address to the male bank tellers—did we learn that for most of its history our building had served as the town's brothel. Now it housed us, and a few crazy old women who rarely came out from behind their doors. We were so chronically broke that I was forced to learn to cook the hard (and best) way—like a French peasant, with a few fresh ingredients bought in tiny quantities at the market each day. We boiled carrots and saved the water for broth. We figured out how to thicken soups with potatoes and crushed tomatoes. And since we were in Dijon, we made the happy discovery that strong mustard and cheap burgundy could improve almost anything.

But that was many years ago. Long since I have become a mother, which is the best training for becoming a good servant. Madame would be very proud to employ me now. I can't think of her without a pang of sympathy. How useless I must have been! When my little daughter helps me to make a salad, I find myself fussing over her, tearing the pieces smaller and saying sharply, "No, no, no—we're not rabbits!" And to this day, of all the things I've learned to cook, I remain proudest of my roast chicken. ●

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Help!

Birds need it, bees need it, we all need it.
An evolutionary view by *Olivia Vlahos*

"Help!" sang John Lennon, "I need somebody. Help! Not just anybody!" As it happens, everybody needs help. Especially when bringing up baby. And in tradition and by nature's law, help seldom comes from just anybody but rather from next of kin. That is as true in the animal world as in ours.

There is, for example, "aunting behavior," much studied by specialists, among such disparate beings as elephants, dolphins, and monkeys. Other creatures—among them scrub jays, beavers, wolves, and jackals—depend on help from older siblings. One generation of progeny obligingly suppresses its own sexual drives in order to nursemaid the younger siblings until they are able to care for the next batch of babies to come along. Most bees, wasps, and ants among insects and their mammalian counter-parts, the Naked Mole Rats, forego breeding altogether in deference to the "queen" of each colony, whose huge reproductive output they are predestined to feed and tend. Sisters, all of them, under their hairless skin.

Early human beings made a specialty of coupledom, interdependent both in bringing home the bacon and bringing up baby. Indeed, some anthropologists think it was by way of this strategy of reproduction that we became human in the first place. Even so, the mated pair have always needed some help to make their joint venture a success. After all, who would be on hand to help Mum and the little ones while Dad was busy hunting? Why, her sisters and her cousins and her aunts—that's who.

In societies of small scale and simple living, kinship has always offered the most reliable principle of organization, not only for purposes of collaboration and protection, but in keeping order and in keeping fed. Family (read community) obligations were often vested in the terms by which people addressed one another. In many cultures, mother's sister is also "mother," and her children are not "cousins" but rather siblings. Ditto father's brother and his offspring. (The specialist calls these two groups of youngsters "parallel cousins.") In effect, such a system ensures that no child can be bereft of parental care. But wait, you ask. What if Mum has no sister or Dad no brother? No problem. The powers of parallel construction guarantee the presence of an appropriate stand-in.

The search for help outside the extended family circle must have begun with the creation of the world's first cities, some six or seven thousand years ago. Certainly it happened with the appearance of class structure. People at the top were then able to command the help of those at the bottom. Sometimes these were slaves, purchased especially to help in child care and other arduous tasks. And yet, even in households with many slaves, some faint echo of kin remained. Roman slaves were incorporated along with relatives, clients, and various other dependents in a *familia* headed

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by its patriarch.

The sense of family belonging, however attenuated, continued when slavery went out of style, and help for upper-crust establishments was found among peasants attached to the land—apprentices, retainers, and hangers-on of every description. A great family's special fondness for the nurses that tended its children can be read in the wills from medieval times. High-born ladies bequeathed property not only to their children's nurses, but to their own as well. Ties were especially close because nurse was a surrogate mother in every possible way, providing milk as well as watchfulness. She was, in the parlance of the time, a "wet nurse," chosen by Dad whose duty it was to find her. Priests in Renaissance Florence thundered against the practice, calling wet nurses "sows" who would pervert the young. To no avail. It was all very well, Florentine custom held, for peasants and artisan women to nurse their babies themselves. Aristocratic ladies had other fish to fry.

Eventually the wet nurse went out of fashion, but not the need for help in bringing up baby and, indeed, in running the large and drafty homes of the rich. Servants came to occupy a class all their own, ordered by tradition and reflecting the demeanor of their masters. Relations between them and their employers followed strict protocols hallowed by time. As predictable as clockwork, the same scenario was enacted daily in every household large enough to require a staff.

One of the most striking characters in the cast of British help was the nanny. A thorough professional, not quite a servant and almost but not quite a member of the family, Nanny wore her own distinctive uniform, ruled her own domain (the nursery), and had her own helpers—one or more nursemaids. She was generally conceded to be far better suited to the task of raising baby than baby's own parents. Indeed, the upper-class British child (particularly if a boy) saw rather little of Mum and even less of Dad. For at age eight or thereabouts he graduated from Nanny's care to that of masters and older boys at a boarding school. And yet, even with so little parental attention, the proper British child turned out to be a remarkably solid and respectable citizen, exemplifying the values of his parents' world. This could happen because the pattern of British culture was subscribed to by nearly everyone. In spite of class differences and considerable poverty, a common ethos prevailed.

From America's beginnings, tonier families—especially those in southern states—modeled their styles of living after the British standard. But America's middle and working classes have always been larger than those above and below them. Thus, their patterns of living were more typical of the nation as a whole—including their attitudes about help. Never mind how seedy the family, Mum always had at least one helper at home: a poor relation from the "old country," a widow down on her luck, an immigrant or a black woman helping to keep her family afloat. Scenarios of help played out in such homes were more informal, with more of a family feeling than those on view in great houses.

And then, in the late 1800s, things began to change. The numbers of women glad to work as help began to trickle away with the appearance in New England of the first water-powered looms. By World War I, the trickle had become a flood. Help became hard to come by. The lady of the house soon found herself the maid-of-all-work and solo baby tender to boot.

The advent of electricity and labor-saving devices did reduce the effort of housework but somehow not the time needed to do it. The invention of the automobile gave Mum yet another job. She became a chauffeur, driving the kids to sports, to play dates, to enrichment lessons of every sort. What's more, Mum was now supposed to adore her full-time job and to do it with educated intelligence and skill. A popular mantra from the 1930s through the 1950s was, "What would home be without Mother?"

Historian Ruth Schwartz Cowen traced woman's changing role through women's magazines (the oldest of which has been in continuous circulation since 1886). Their glorification of motherhood and marriage in the 1950s—contrary to the popular feminist historical interpretation—was promoted not by men, but by women. "Household angels" publicly pitied those women who *had* to work outside the home. They looked with righteous scorn on those who *chose* to do so. How did they feed their families? Out of cans? Tsk, tsk. The advertising industry—which knows a trend when it sees one—extolled the virtues of shining windows and spotless floors. Not too many years later—when Women's Lib was on the march, and work place came to outrank home base—the industry would effortlessly shift gears to feature the woman who had "come a long way, baby" or who could "bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never let him forget he's a man."

That image has been short-lived. For no woman is Wonder Woman.

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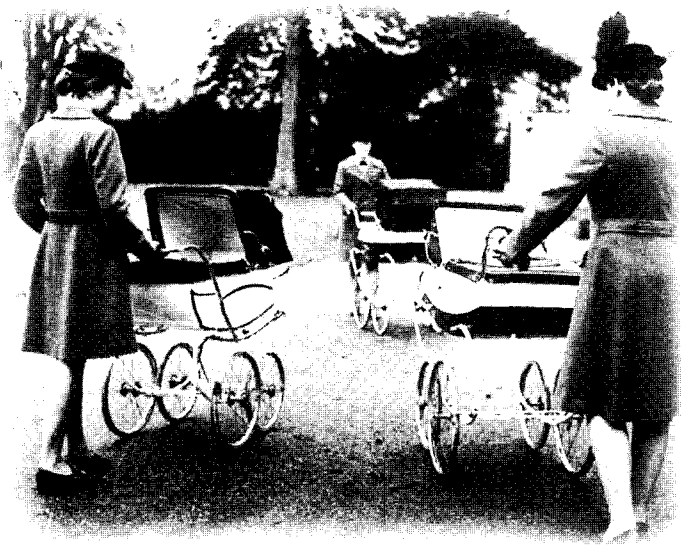
No woman can work in the office and remain the "angel of the home." More important, how is Mum to win the bread and bring up baby simultaneously? Especially since her Mum and Dad are, likely as not, busy with their own pursuits in a distant city or enjoying their Florida retirement. "Help!" cry working mothers. "We need somebody!" That somebody should not be just anybody goes without saying.

BUT WHERE IS somebody to come from? Who will fill the gap? The teenage au pair? The immigrant woman with little English and less familiarity with American ideas and ways? And how should help be treated once obtained? Like a member of the family? Like an underling? Will the help love Baby as much as Mum and Dad do? Will the baby love her? More than Mum? (Horrors!) Will Baby turn out to be like Nanny or like Mum and Dad?

All these concerns have taken shape in real-life stories and their fictional spin-offs. Worried parents have spied on Nanny via hidden camera, sometimes with shocking results. The press and cinema have featured murderous nannies, negligent nannies, and seductive nannies who steal away the man of the house. Most parents, in any case, cannot afford nannies and must rely on day care. Here the relationship is entirely contractual and remote, devoid of family feeling altogether. Acceptable, perhaps, in a school setting but worrisome to the parents of a toddler. Here, too, the horror stories abound. The children abused. The children not abused but claiming to have been so. The bizarre trials of day care providers. The harsh punishments rightly or wrongly levied on them. All reflective of tensions and guilt on the part of parents who feel the child should be in his own home.

Sometimes guilt is well and truly earned, say the help. My own students —some of them day care providers, some au pair girls, permitted to attend community college—have had their stories to tell. An Irish girl spoke of sitting for days in a rocking chair with a sick child in her arms, uncertain whether she had a right to call the doctor without Mum's permission. And which doctor? Mum, a well-to-do single parent, had left no instructions and indication of her own whereabouts before going on vacation with her boyfriend. A day care operator had a similar complaint. She was going out of business, she told me, solely because of negligent parents who failed to retrieve their children at closing time. How was *she* to deal with their fears of abandonment? And then there was the nursery school teacher who described for me a mother's unusual demand. The teacher was to do nothing, Mum insisted, to inhibit the flowering of her baby daughter's sexuality. But what about the sexuality of little boys? Should that not be untrammeled as well? No way. Consider the two six-year-olds recently punished by school officials for pecking little girls on the cheek. Will Emily Post or her current avatar kindly delineate the proprieties here?

The social scientist sees all these contradictions and tensions as markers of a society in cultural disarray. Patterns joyfully broken during the riotous sixties have not yet been reconstituted or replaced. We must make up our lives as we go along without benefit of precedent, nor much in the way of institutional help. Parents may valiantly struggle to give life a reasonable structure. They cannot be sure, however, that their child will hear at school the same cultural messages he hears at home.



If the vast middle of American society has lost the patterns which once eased the problems of getting, keeping, and interacting with help that is "almost family," the lower social echelons have in large numbers lost family altogether. Many children—with parents and other relatives in jail or hopelessly drug addicted—must bring themselves up on the streets. Some take refuge in gangs of their peers and deal drugs. It's no surprise that, while crime rates are generally falling, crimes committed by youths are on the rise.

Help! We all need somebody. And, please, not just anybody. But who? ◆

Olivia Vlahos is an anthropologist and author of seven books in her field.

Photo by Brian Long shows the parade ground at the Norland Nursery Training College in England

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The Token Man

Two-Cat Women

Ladies, a second cat will condemn you to spinsterhood, warns *Jonathan Foreman*

As a single man whose formerly carefree personal life has been adversely affected by a pernicious book called *The Rules*, I feel ambivalent about adding a new rule to those that women must follow in order to get hitched. But experience tells me that this is a rule that bears no exceptions. Namely, a single women who wishes to get married must never, ever own more than one cat.

The statistics which purported to show that the chances of a woman over the age of thirty-five finding a husband were smaller than her chances of being killed by terrorists were revealed to be false. But in many of our big cities there really are significant obstacles to finding a life-mate. Otherwise there wouldn't be so many attractive, successful women who are alone and not happy about it. They are confronted by a shortage of men who are straight, attractive, and neither threatened by a strong woman nor obsessed by the company of other males.

In New York, you cannot go to a writing class, health club, or dancing lesson without encountering several unmarried thirty-something women who are beginning to get that *look*. It reminds me of the wolfish, hungry expression you see on the faces of adolescent boys who would do almost anything to lose their virginity. I wore one for years and girls found it a total turn-off. I had to resign myself to a life of monastic continence before a sympathetic lady released me from my condition.

Unfortunately, such resignation doesn't work with women who wish to marry. The next stage after desperation is bitterness. And then abject surrender—a surrender symbolized by the acquisition of cats. Men know this and they therefore associate multiple-cat ownership with desperation, bitterness, and surrender even though a woman who buys cats may do so while she is still happy and attractive.

Two or more cats become an obvious substitute for both children and a male companion. They soon dominate the dwelling of their owner. They sleep in her bed. They sharpen their claws on her furniture. Their smell—a mixture of kitty litter, cat food, and wet fur—becomes a permanent and unerasable feature of her apartment, a kind of anti-pheromone, powerfully repellent to the human male.

Among the worst effects are on a woman's bathroom. As a bachelor I have enormous admiration for a (catless) woman's bathroom. It is usually so much nicer than one's own: a haven of hygiene, a place full of feminine mystery, a shrine to the marketing genius of the beauty industry—every spare inch covered by bottles and tubs of sweet-smelling potions. But once cats take over, you can see their hairs everywhere. You don't want to touch the towels. You realize that the cat owner's awareness of dirt and her sense of smell have become severely compromised.

Then there is the character issue. One might hope that cat owners would gradually become as seductively flirtatious as their feline companions. But for some reason, multiple-cat owners only absorb the less attractive cat-like traits. They become willful, selfish, vengeful, and cruel. They alternate between gross laziness and frantic activity, lying awake at night and dozing during the day. And when it comes to their appearance, multi-cat owners transfer all the attention they ever paid to themselves to their pets. Their cats always have sleek, brushed coats, while the owners get fat or excessively skinny. They take to wearing drab tent dresses or moldy old sweats, and they give up entirely on their hair.

They also become excessively territorial. Any man who might be considering staying for the night soon picks up the vibration from both cats and mistress that there is no room for him. And if cats see their mistress cuddling up to a stranger, they will immediately stage a diversion, either by interposing their own bodies between the smooching couple, or by "accidentally" knocking things off shelves.

The awful thing is that most people assume that lonely, difficult spinsters live with four or five cats because they are alone. They fail to realize that the causal relationship goes the other way. These women are alone, difficult, etc., *because* they live with four or five cats.

I actually like cats, despite being mildly allergic to them. I once delayed breaking up with a girlfriend for three terrible months because I had become so attached to her two tabbies. So it is more in sorrow than anger that I proclaim the two cat rule—one that every mother should tell her daughter: "It is better to be lonely than to have more than one cat; you probably won't be lonely for long. But if you should be tempted by an extra cat, abandon all hope. You will be alone forever." ◆

Jonathan Foreman is a writer in New York.

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Correspondence

WE ARE THRILLED that so many of you are taking the time to write to us, particularly by e-mail, a technology we still find exciting (we greet the arrival of a message with as much awe and wonder as the first recipients of transatlantic cable). The only drawback to e-mail is its encouragement of informality, particularly in business correspondence. We don't seem to be able to train our computer to address e-mail recipients by their titles; it always insists, like a rude bank teller, upon calling people by their first names. Congratulations to reader Marguerite Snow, who figured out a perfectly proper e-mail address for herself: MRSSNOW@etc.

Meanwhile, we continue to be attacked in the feminist press by women who react to our "retro" drawings like Vietnam veterans to backfiring cars. Just the sight of our little coffee lady on the subscription card seems to have sent academic feminist Wendy Kaminer screaming (what does *she do when she passes a suburban ranch home?). You can read her rant in the November/December issue of* American Prospect, *a snoozer for the left-leaning. Perhaps we should run a contest asking readers to come up with Ten Things a Feminist Might Actually Find Funny. Clarence Thomas impaled upon a spike? In any case, we've added Ms. Kaminer's name to our special list of those who receive free, lifetime subscriptions to* TWQ.

Keep writing! Send your letter to the editor c/o The Women's Quarterly, *2111 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 550, Arlington, Virginia 22201-3057, or fax it to 703/243-9230. E-mail: iwf@iwf.org.*

Home schooling

THANK YOU FOR interviewing Dr. Laura Schlessinger (Autumn 1996)! I am delighted that, armed with only a radio, I

can not only audit courses at the Limbaugh Institute for Advanced Conservative Studies, and have a seat at Mary Matalin's salon hour every afternoon, but can also access Dr. Laura's daily lectures on character, courage, and conscience.

Thanks to the profound importance Dr. Laura places on being her kid's mom, I have increased confidence and pride in taking on the day. I now have the courage to answer all important questions with the same response: "I'm a mom." For example, to the college student who asked me, "Will you ever use your English degree?" I said, "I'm a mom. I use it every day." And to my sister-in-law who, after reading an issue of *TWQ* that I loaned to her, asked, "How do you always find these great publications?" I said, "I'm a mom. I have to stay on the cutting edge."

ANITA ASHLAND
Madison, Wisconsin

Dr. Laura/Bill Bennett in 2000?

I ENJOYED YOUR Autumn 1996 issue tremendously. I can't resist a few comments on the handy guide to the New and Old Traditionalists (NTs and OTs):

• On cooking gurus: I cook from the *New Joy of Cooking*, but what I really covet is my mother's copy of the original *J of C!* The best comfort food in the world!

• As one (at least so far) without children (and who practices avoidance as my response to unruly ones), I wondered—who is Penelope Leach? And do kids really eat turkey on pita and "fruit roll-ups"?

• I'm glad you listed the L.L. Bean catalogue, not the ghastly J. Crew with the tiny little clothes and the snooty models who all look like the new Mrs. John John Kennedy.

• On heretical thoughts: of course Saint Phyllis and Joe McCarthy were right; they both just needed to learn that you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

• Even more provoking than women soldiers to this NT—women priests, or the very idea of them.

• The real thing to like about Hillary is that Chelsea seems to be her highest priority and to have turned out more normal than Amy Carter (or Patti Davis).

• And finally, on role models: Bill Bennett? Are you kidding? After reading this issue, there's only one person I consider suitable as the new National Role Model: Laura Schlessinger. Let's clone her!

CATHY BARR WINDELS
New York, New York

We all still have a few issues to work through

I CONSIDERED LETTING my subscription lapse after reading that feature on "What Does Woman Want?" (Summer 1996). I figured you had run out of things to say. Fortunately, however, the autumn issue on the "New Traditionalists" proved me wrong. You said a lot. Among other articles, I enjoyed the interview with Laura Schlessinger. However, her experience also illustrates how difficult it is to be a "New Traditionalist." A little defensively, Schlessinger points out that her son is her highest priority and notes, for example,

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that she always travels with her husband and her son. But she can be a "New Traditionalist" only because of very special factors. 1) She is unusually talented; 2) her husband works at home; and 3) she has just one child.

Yes, it's possible to be a "New Traditionalist." And those of us who waited long enough to have a child, as I did, and then had only one, can achieve that status—if we have an accommodating husband and a good job. Not everyone is quite so lucky.

JANE SHAW
Political Economy Research Center
Bozeman, Montana

Gave up job—but not hope or glory

I REALLY ENJOYED the interview with Dr. Laura. I was amused that [interviewer] Maureen Sirhal seemed to have trouble accepting the fact that women do not have to work outside the home to have an identity (amazing how the prevailing thought can ooze into our consciousness if we aren't careful!). I believe, though, that Dr. Laura is still holding the rest of us to a standard she is unwilling to meet. She is indeed fortunate to have a husband who can work at home and therefore a child that is not subjected to day care. But in reality, many of us, if committed to family, must just give up the idea of a career.

I don't have a career or a paycheck. What I have is the home I make with our five kids. It's risky—I'm dependent financially on my husband—but life is risky and anything worth achieving entails risk. I don't feel that I've lost my identity. On the contrary, I've learned so much about myself and others. I can study Augustine, Austen, Kafka, and Aquinas. I can learn Spanish. I have learned cooking, car care, and developmental psychology. No, I haven't specialized in one thing long enough to be a world-class expert, but I know enough about a lot of things to enrich my life, and to give to my kids the appreciation of learning and trying. Those kids are the best and most important career I could have and I am proud to be rearing them.

I also think that Dr. Laura is way off base about waiting to be thirty to marry. If I had done that I would not have been the mother of five, but of none. My childbearing years were very limited. Career years can happen anytime (my mom started a business in her fifties), education and degrees can happen anytime, but babies can only happen in a short window in a woman's adulthood. We should respect that. Maybe we should encourage women to wait until forty to have a degree! And by the way, Dr. Laura, even at twenty I knew enough to pick a stable, financially secure man who shares my faith and morals. Give at least some of us credit for growing up at a faster rate than you did.

DOROTHY O'CONNELL
[via e-mail]

A gentleman is not a wimp

AMONG YOUR COMMENTS in "One Last Observation" (Autumn 1996), you referred to the "Code of a Gentleman" as so much "old-fashioned nonsense." I assume that you were attributing this sentiment to the Supreme Court's decision on the Virginia Military Institute, and were disappointed. If so, I agree with you.

I have never found gentlemanly behavior to be burdensome, limiting, or untoward. A gentleman is indeed that—a man, and a gentle one—and in no way seeks to misuse his strength for the abuse of others, whether that person is male or female, grown adult or growing child. I am concerned that such consideration is regarded as "old-fashioned" in a time and society in which wife beating, rape, harassment, murder, and child abuse are frequent headlines. Truly, I think these headlines demonstrate the need for more disciplined and mannerly behavior, particularly among those trained to become the strongest and most aggressive of all. What good can come of it if we gain strength at the expense of respect, discipline, and honor?

LYNNE EDWARDS
Arlington, Virginia

Socrates hit the ol' nail on the head, too

I'VE ENJOYED DANIELLE Crittenden's appearances on C-Span and of course I love *TWQ*. I'd also like to say how much I enjoyed her musings on architecture and the differences between the Old and New Traditionalists. However, she didn't go back quite far enough for me. Right now I'm stripping down my furniture and repainting it to look like leftovers from the Italian Renaissance. I believe that Niccolo Machiavelli had it about right.

MARGUERITE SNOW
Stockton, California

Coming soon: TWQ*'s New Chocolate Diet*

IT'S REALLY NICE to have a women's magazine without another way to lose ten pounds immediately followed by fifteen pages of death by chocolate desserts. I am enjoying your publication immensely. You have thoughtful, timely articles and even a sense of humor. I have shared my complimentary copy with several friends.

After reading Candace Crandall's article "Legal But Not Safe" (Summer 1996), I was heartbroken about the corruption in the abortion industry. Even more of a tragedy is the fact that we have taught our children that the only two choices are abortion and keeping your baby.

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Adoption is a choice, too. It is a choice that is usually only discussed in the most negative of terms.

ADELE PAULEY
Decatur, Georgia

We don't mind doing clean-up

OH MY, WHERE to start?! I received a sample copy of *TWQ* and was so delighted that I promptly sent for a one year subscription. As a woman in her mid-sixties, I have watched the feminist movement for years (starting back when Betty Friedan and others began belittling stay-at-home moms). As an intelligent woman who has lived in many worlds over the years (stay-at-home mom, divorced mom, out-in-the-work force mom, etc.), I'm convinced that the feminist movement has been and still is headed in the wrong direction. Of course I'm in favor of issues such as equal pay for equal work and the opportunity to pursue a career either in or out of the home (or both), but the scathing denigration of men makes me want to disavow myself from feminism. Neither have I found much in common with the Phyllis Schlaflys, either. Therefore, I have felt more and more politically alienated from women over the years.

Enter *TWQ. Eureka!* A forum where ideas can be discussed rationally without total adherence to the orthodoxies or political correctness of either the left or right. When I read Danielle Crittenden's Diary ("Gender Pap," Autumn 1996), I nearly leapt out of my chair with joy and identification! I, too, watched most of both political conventions, and was more and more disturbed with what I saw. As the election got closer, I felt discouraged—not with the politicians, but with the electorate (women in particular) who have apparently bought into the notion that government should be doing more for them (replacing husbands and/or fathers?). Now that the election is over, women of the sort who are writing for *TWQ* have a lot of work to do in re-educating our sisters. It seems an insurmountable task but I'm encouraged to find some women questioning what was not too long ago considered the truth by so many. I look forward to more stimulating articles in *TWQ*.

LYNN PIERCE
Ramona, California

DON'T GET MAD, GET A MANICURE

THE DATING BOOK *The Rules* tops bestseller lists, formerly liberated women around the country are now primly claiming to be "Rules Girls," and some are even shelling out $250 for private phone consultations with the book's authors, Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, two *yentas* from suburban New York. Their magic prescription for the lonely girl? Play hard to get.

That this pearl of wisdom—so frequently passed along (or shouted) by one's grandmother as one eagerly headed out the door for a date—should be causing such fuss and controversy is nothing short of amazing, except of course to those who thought forty thousand years of male-female dynamics had been overturned in 1968. Amazing too, to one's grandmother ("See? What have I been telling you? I could've been rich by now, if I'd written it down....").

The book's subtitle is "Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right." There follow thirty-five rules that the authors, like the great French chefs, stress should be followed to the letter if you want the results they promise, in this case marriage—and marriage in the classic, fairy-tale fashion, *forever*, to a prince of a guy. Above all, they urge women to conceal their true feelings, no matter how innocuous, at least in the early stages of a relationship: "Women who call men, ask them out, conveniently have two tickets to a show, or offer sex on the first date," the authors explain, "destroy male ambition and animal drive. Remember, let him take the lead. He declares love first, just as he picks most of the movies, the restaurants, and the concerts the two of you go to. He might sometimes ask you for your preference, in which case you can tell him."

Most men hate *The Rules.* They think it's deceptive and manipulative, the Wonderbra of dating. Even Laurence Kirshbaum, CEO of Warner Books, the company that published the book, laments its popularity: "My reaction to it is one of great sadness," he recently told *Time* magazine. "If this is what relations between the sexes have come down to, I think we're in trouble."

But maybe no one hates *The Rules* so much as feminists, who view it as dangerously reactionary. In a review of the book in *Slate*, Microsoft's on-line magazine, Katha Pollitt seethed: "The woman depicted as in need of *The Rules* is a voracious doormat, the sort of woman who sends men Hallmark greeting cards or long letters after a single date, who rummages in men's drawers and pockets, suggests couples therapy when brief relationships start to crumble, throws away a new boyfriend's old clothes, cleans (and redecorates) his apartment without asking, and refuses to see the most obvious signs of disengagement."

As the book's authors might cheerfully retort: "And is *she* married?"

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One last observation . . .

Betcha Haven't Seen Figures Like These!

The myth of the wage gap and other eye-popping statistics

Are women victims of a discriminatory world? The marketplace, we are frequently told, is treacherous for women. They are paid less than men, forced into less prestigious jobs, and are denied entrance to the upper level of management because of their sex.

The truth is much different, according to a new report published by the Independent Women's Forum and the American Enterprise Institute. Women's Figures: The Economic Progress of Women in America, *by economist Diana Furchtgott-Roth and historian Christine Stolba, presents a very different portrait of women in society. Their comprehensive analysis of the economic status of women—one that, unlike others, takes into account life choices made by women, market forces, employment experience, and education—shows little evidence that systematic discrimination towards women exists.*

Here are some highlights from their study:

Motherhood, not discrimination, accounts for the wage gap

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data show that among people aged twenty-seven to thirty-three who have never had a child, women's earnings are close to ninety-eight percent of men's. It's after women give birth that their work patterns change. According to economist June O'Neill, head of the Congressional Budget Office, "When earnings comparisons are restricted to men and women more similar in their experience and life situations, the measured earnings differentials are typically quite small." Choice of occupation, seniority, absenteeism, and intermittent workforce participation (such as taking time out to raise children) affect overall wages.

Shattering the Glass Ceiling

The Glass Ceiling Commission Report examined only Fortune 2000 companies, which represent only a small portion of the economy. It says little about women's success in the American economy as a whole. Women's gains in the corporate world have actually been remarkable. The Korn/Ferry executive search firm found in a recent study that, during the past decade, the number of female executive vice-presidents more than doubled and the number of female senior vice-presidents increased by seventy-five percent. The Department of Labor reports that from 1920 to 1980, women's wages grew at a rate twenty percent faster than men's. So why are women still under-represented at the top? Labor force participation rates reveal that women have been working in significant numbers only for about thirty years. There remains a lack of educated and experienced women available to be nominated for such high-level positions. Motherhood rears its head again as well: After they give birth, many women become unwilling to put in the long hours necessary to reach CEO positions and voluntarily remove themselves from the executive track.

Women are getting more educated, too

Women have outnumbered men in graduate school since the mid-1980s. In 1996, women represented fifty-four percent of those admitted to Yale Medical School. In 1994, women earned more associate, bachelor's, and master's degrees than men.

That's enough affirmative action!

Female labor force participation increased from twenty-six percent in 1940 to fifty-nine percent in 1995. More than seventy percent of women between the ages of twenty and fifty-four are currently in the labor force.

The "pink ghetto" ain't so bad if you're a mom

Many women choose to enter the so-called "pink ghetto" because the jobs offer much needed flexibility; job skills are also much less likely to deteriorate in these fields, allowing women to leave the work force for a period and return. A 1995 study by Claudia Goldin, a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research, found that among those women she studied who have a successful, high-paying career, nearly fifty percent were childless. ◆

You may order a copy of *Women's Figures* by calling the Independent Women's Forum at 1-800-224-6000.

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An "increasingly high-profile group that says the time has come to put a new face on feminism."

–Ed Bradley, correspondent for CBS's "60 Minutes," on the IWF

For the past five years, the Independent Women's Forum has been taking on the old establishment of feminist organizations—and winning. "The IWF has a profile almost unheard of for a group that is the new kid on the block," writes the *Boston Globe*. "In the marketplace of ideas, from the national news media all the way down to local radio, the IWF has shown its real strength. . . . [The] IWF is well on its way to becoming the foremost media nemesis of the feminist movement."

Why has the IWF been so successful? Because the women who make up the IWF are not radical ideologues —they're businesswomen, economists, lawyers, truck drivers, and also mothers. Because the IWF promotes individual responsibility, strong families, limited government, and opportunity—policies that help *all* Americans. Because the IWF, a non-partisan, non-profit Washington-based organization, sponsors speaker events and conferences noted for their provocative and free-ranging debates. And because the IWF publishes *The Women's Quarterly*—an intellectual antidote to *Ms.*—which syndicated columnist Mona Charen praises as, "My type of women's magazine! With humor and sarcasm but also with warmth and passion, these women offer an intelligent refutation of the leading feminist nonsense that is swallowed so uncritically by the mainstream press."

Why not join us? Check "Yes, I want to join" on the enclosed reply card, and you'll receive a year's subscription to *The Women's Quarterly** as well as our insiders-only newsletter *Ex Femina,* special invitations to our conferences and speeches, and discounts on books and events. Most important, you'll be adding another voice of reason—yours!—to the cultural and political debates of our time.

* Separate subscriptions to *The Women's Quarterly* are also available. See reply card for details.

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